

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Eighth Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT WINE (AMENDMENT) (ENGLAND)
REGULATIONS 2024

Wednesday 17 January 2024

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: JAMES GRAY

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|---|---|
| † Atherton, Sarah (<i>Wrexham</i>) (Con) | † Metcalfe, Stephen (<i>South Basildon and East Thurrock</i>) (Con) |
| † Djanogly, Mr Jonathan (<i>Huntingdon</i>) (Con) | † Morris, Grahame (<i>Easington</i>) (Lab) |
| † Elphicke, Mrs Natalie (<i>Dover</i>) (Con) | † Norman, Jesse (<i>Hereford and South Herefordshire</i>) (Con) |
| † Fabricant, Michael (<i>Lichfield</i>) (Con) | † Spencer, Mark (<i>Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries</i>) |
| † Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab) | Whitley, Mick (<i>Birkenhead</i>) (Lab) |
| Foy, Mary Kelly (<i>City of Durham</i>) (Lab) | † Zeichner, Daniel (<i>Cambridge</i>) (Lab) |
| † Howell, Paul (<i>Sedgefield</i>) (Con) | Aaron Kulakiewicz, <i>Committee Clerk</i> |
| † Kawczynski, Daniel (<i>Shrewsbury and Atcham</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |
| † Largan, Robert (<i>High Peak</i>) (Con) | |
| † Lavery, Ian (<i>Wansbeck</i>) (Lab) | |
| † McDonnell, John (<i>Hayes and Harlington</i>) (Lab) | |

Eighth Delegated Legislation Committee

Wednesday 17 January 2024

[JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

Draft Wine (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2024

4.30 pm

The Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries (Mark Spencer): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Wine (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2024.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. The regulations were laid before the House on 4 December. The Government are taking this necessary step to take account of obligations relating to the marketing of wine in the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership—or the CPTPP, as Members will know it—following the UK’s signing of the protocol of accession.

The instrument introduces rules governing how products marketed as ice wine must be produced. Ice wine is a type of dessert wine produced from grapes that have been frozen while still on the vine. Currently, ice wine is not produced domestically, but it is imported. Annual global production is very small, but it can yield high-quality wines that sell at premium prices. Therefore, it is important to ensure that products marketed as ice wine are marketed correctly, to support consumers in their choices.

The instrument applies the relevant restriction in England only. Separate instruments applying to Scotland and Wales are being made for the purpose of continuity, so that the same restriction applies across Great Britain and enables CPTPP accession. This type of imported wine will continue to be able to move from Great Britain to Northern Ireland via the Northern Ireland retail movement scheme under the Windsor framework.

The instrument will also update the list of oenological practices, processes and restrictions that may be used in the production and conservation of wine in other wine products. The changes are highly technical in nature and relate, for example, to the use of discontinuous high-pressure processes, which reduce yeast contamination in wine and therefore the reliance on sulphites to preserve wine and help to improve its fermentation. I am told that reducing sulphites also means that you are less likely to have a headache the next morning.

The Scottish Government have made the same changes, and the Welsh Government are in the process of doing so. That will ensure that producers across Great Britain benefit from the latest technological developments and winemaking practices.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The legislation we are dealing with refers to marketing. In this post-Brexit period, will these things be marketed by the pint?

Mark Spencer: I actually think they will be marketed by the half-bottle—in my limited experience, dessert wines tend to come in half-bottles. If the hon. Gentleman reaches for the internet when he makes these purchases, I am sure there will be more information there.

The changes before us align with those adopted by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine since 2009 and approved by the UK through our membership of that organisation. The instrument was notified to the World Trade Organisation’s Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, and no comments were received.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Will the Minister give examples of the different oenological practices introduced by the IOVW? I am a bit stumped by that.

Mark Spencer: I can help the hon. Gentleman out. The regulations are about making sure, for consumers who buy ice wine, that the correct process has been followed, and that includes the grapes being frozen on the vine. It is possible to create dessert wine by harvesting the grapes and then freezing them mechanically to change the sugars so that the wine becomes sweeter. However, ice wine is produced only as a result of a natural frost while the grapes are on the vine, and the regulations are about protecting that process, although we do not use it in the UK, and it is quite uncommon in Europe as well. They are about protecting this product so that consumers buying ice wine know that the grapes have been frozen naturally rather than in a freezer.

Ian Lavery: Is it ice wine or nice wine?

Mark Spencer: It is ice wine, but I am told it is also quite nice.

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): I note the decline in standards in explanatory memoranda, in that my right hon. Friend—who has been a member of the Cabinet—is not acknowledged as such in the explanatory memorandum; however, I think that is a matter for his civil servants. Given that we do not have an ice wine industry in this country, why are we passing this legislation?

Mark Spencer: That is a very good question. It is quite simply because the ice wine brand, as it were, is not currently protected in the UK. In signing up to CPTPP, an obligation was placed on us to recognise this product and register it in the UK. Ice wine is mostly made in Canada, which is a signatory to that agreement. This is about protecting their ice wine producers’ brand, as it were.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): The Minister is very helpfully explaining this product. Will he say whether the change will be to the detriment of Eiswein produced in Germany, which is obviously a more popularly known product in the UK?

Mark Spencer: This is about ensuring that UK consumers, when choosing which wine to purchase, understand the process and the methodology by which it has been made and can make that choice for themselves. I commend the regulations to the Committee.

4.36 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve once again with you in the Chair, Mr Gray. I thank the Minister for his exemplary introduction. I had always pictured him with a pint of bitter in his hand, but perhaps I will now picture him with an ice wine chaser to go with it. Let me reassure the Minister and the Whips that, given the support that the industry has expressed for this SI, and given that it concerns a very niche product, we do not intend to press for a vote.

I note the important contribution made by the wine sector to this country's economy. The vast majority of wine consumed here—some 99%—is imported. We recognise and accept the need for the rules inherited from the EU to be updated and streamlined to help the sector to operate even more efficiently. I appreciate that efforts have been made through this legislation to bring the UK's wine regulations in line with the CPTPP as regards ice wine.

The Minister has explained that the instrument restricts the use of the term “ice wine” to products made exclusively from grapes naturally frozen on the vine, as opposed to those made from frozen grapes. In relation to the CPTPP, as the Minister has told us, Canada is the major producer of ice wine, but CPTPP's progress puts us on a different parliamentary scrutiny and legislative path. We know that the economic benefits of the treaty appear to be small. The Government's impact assessment indicated that the long-run increase in GDP would be worth only 0.06%.

As with so many of these trade deals, we need to watch with great care to see whether these small economic benefits are being achieved at the expense of our environmental or welfare standards. The Trade and Agriculture Commission report on the CPTPP notes that the Pesticide Action Network UK has reported that there are 119 pesticide products not permitted for use in the UK that are permitted to varying extents by one or more of the 11 parties to the CPTPP treaty. It needs to be made clear that the deal does not enable food and wine produced elsewhere to lower standards to compete unfairly with our own producers. In this case, of course, we do not have producers. In relation to unfair competition, the Trade and Agriculture Commission report on the CPTPP noted:

“This is important, as CPTPP is likely to lead to increased imports of products that have been produced at lower cost by using pesticides in...parties that would not be permitted in the UK.”

The Chair: Order. I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I think that what he is saying regarding the CPTPP in general is beyond the scope of our discussions. We are simply discussing whether or not these grapes can be marketed here under a particular name.

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful, Mr Gray, and I understand the point that you make. May I point out that our concern is that pesticides could have been used on vines that produce ice wine? It is about the changing circumstances for different parties and different rules.

Will the Minister explain what legislation is planned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on wine as a result of the CPTPP and when we can expect those changes to be introduced? Having taken heed of your warnings, Mr Gray, I shall not make the wider points that I was going to make about the concerns of the wine sector about additional bureaucracy, administrative burdens and rising costs. I have possibly made that point without raising those concerns.

A serious point was made by the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee in the House of Lords—the measure was discussed in the other place last night—about parallel legislation in Scotland and Wales. The Committee pointed out that Northern Ireland would be subject to the different rules that apply in the EU. Given that we had a lengthy discussion in the Chamber on Monday evening about the export of live animals for slaughter and the implications for Northern Ireland, I suspect the Minister hopes that members of the Democratic Unionist party are not ardent ice wine drinkers, but is he completely satisfied that there will be no impediments to the movement of ice wine products between Northern Ireland and Great Britain? For instance, does he expect that the labelling of ice wine will be completely consistent across the UK? I leave him with that thought.

4.41 pm

Mark Spencer: I shall address that final point first. The reforms apply only to England, Wales and Scotland, but they are progressing their own statutory instruments. There are no producers of ice wine in Northern Ireland, but imported ice wine can move from Great Britain via the Northern Ireland retail movement scheme and be sold in Northern Ireland, so there will be no restrictions there.

I am grateful to hon. Members and the shadow Minister for their support. I do not want to be dragged into a debate on CPTPP—that is not the purpose of our discussions—but there are upsides to the agreement. In fact, only last week we signed an £18-million deal with Mexico to export pork offal, which is of great benefit to the UK economies. When it comes to pesticides and matters such as lowering the standards of imported products we are very much aware of the need to defend against that. In fact, sanitary and phytosanitary rules are relevant, and the ability of colleagues to challenge some of those things is something that we defend vigorously as well.

This is a good move forward, and it assists with getting the CPTPP agreement into place.

Question put and agreed to.

4.42 pm

Committee rose.

